

# Children of a lesser god

Roxana Kalyanvala is executive director of a Poona-based adoption centre that offers care to lost/abandoned children and helps them find adoptive homes

Text and photos: Khursheed Dinshaw

“When a child comes to our care, our first strong effort is to find the biological home and see whether he/she can continue to be in the birth family,” states Roxana Kalyanvala, executive director of the Poona based Bharatiya Samaj Seva Kendra (BSSK), an adoption center. Giving importance to such “restoration” efforts, she explains that institutional care cannot be a substitute to the care a child would receive in a family.

Their social welfare organization is licensed to keep children from birth to six years of age. The helpless kids left with them may be babies born out of wedlock, children relinquished by the birth families, abandoned and lost children brought through the police and child welfare committee, referrals from doctors, well-wishers, government institutions and others working in the same field. A child wandering away and getting separated from the family she can understand, but Kalyanvala finds it difficult to empathize with parents who use a child as a pawn after a marital fight or to spite the spouse. At BSSK, the children are given the best stimulation, nutrition, medical care, warmth, love and emotional security. They are well cared for by a team of child development and social workers, caretakers, nurses, doctors, psychologists, teachers and volunteers.

Starting BSSK activities from six rented rooms in an old stone bungalow, in their silver jubilee year, 2004, they shifted to their present premises, a six-

storied building. On the ground level is the play area for children and laundry facilities whilst the first floor has boarding facilities for the toddlers and older children. The second floor has provisions for educational and recreational activities for older children with one room earmarked for therapy sessions. The kitchen, dining room and store room are also located at this level.



On the third level is a neonatal intensive care unit [with incubators and photo therapy (controlled exposure to light) facilities] where the preterm, low birth weight and new borns are admitted. One room is earmarked for children who need to be kept in isolation due to some infection. The top three floors are utilized for office purposes.

Under their foster care program babies above one month weighing at least 2.5 kg are placed with families who are paid an honorarium to cater to the needs of the child. Finding suitable adoptive homes for their orphaned and destitute children is the organization’s focus and ultimate emotional reward.

In its 31 years of existence BSSK has “restored” 395 children to their biological

parents, over 3,000 kids have been adopted, more than 4,000 kids cared for, and over 12,000 children aided under the community sponsorship program. As part of their community services, BSSK helps deserving students pursue their education thus improving the children’s future prospects and preventing destitution, institutionalization and juvenile delinquency. With branch offices in Chiplun, Aurangabad and Sangli, the reputation of the organization has grown in terms of professionalism, transparency and child care. Kalyanvala oversees the entire operations and has a total staff of 155 including ayahs, child development workers, clinical psychologists, nurses round the clock, social workers and administration staff.

In addition to administrative work, garnering funds is always a challenge for besides general funding to keep the organization running, they also have to find good institutions and long-term sponsors for the 12 mentally challenged kids in the care of BSSK. Well-wishers are offered the option of sponsoring a meal (for around 80 children) for Rs 1,000, an entire day’s meals for Rs 2,600, or snacks for Rs 600. This is a subsidized amount as they receive ingredients like food grains



Roxana Kalyanvala (top) and with children at the adoption center in Poona

and eggs as donations in kind. Birthdays, anniversaries, functions like weddings and navjotes or death anniversaries are occasions when individuals can support this cause, she recommends. A registered trust with 80-G exemption, donations can be made in the name of "Bharatiya Samaj Seva Kendra."

"Among our wonderful seven board members, two who have been our backbone are Dr Jeroo Coyaji and Dr Statira Wadia from Poona," says Kalyanvala. Associated with BSSK since 1982 both of them along with the other board members have contributed to the overall growth of the organization with their guidance and strategies for future expansion within the available budget and safeguards. Coyaji is the daughter-in-law of the late Dr Banoo Coyaji who was the founder trustee of BSSK along with two others, the late A. D. Gadkari and Usha Modak.

Associated with BSSK for the last 28 years, Kalyanvala recalls the time when after her graduation from Poona she did her postgraduation from Bombay's Tata Institute of Social Sciences, majoring in family and child welfare. As part of her field work, she sought to gain experi-

**"After convocation,  
I again applied  
there and a board  
member... seeing my  
persistence, offered  
me a three-month job"**

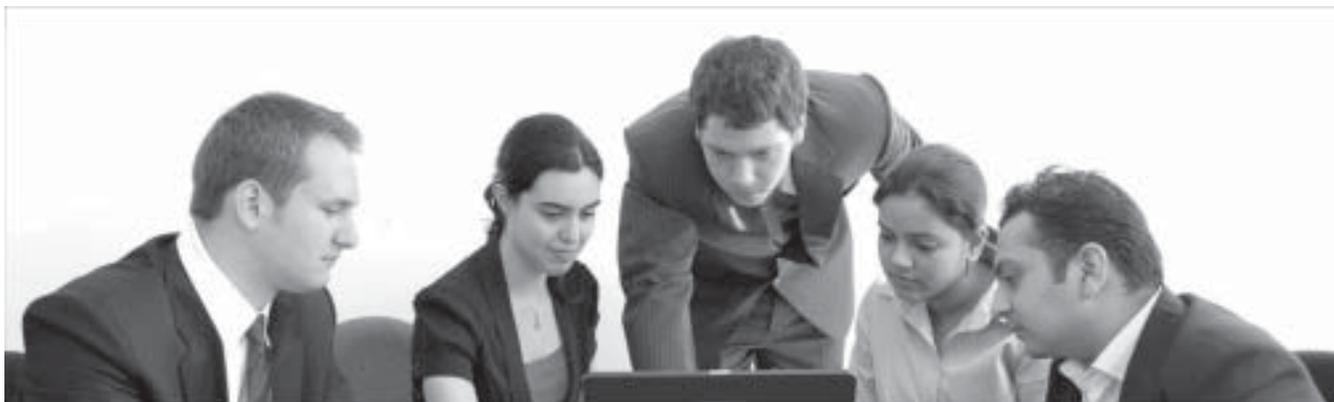
ence at BSSK but they turned her down because she lacked knowledge of Marathi which they considered vital for the organization's many activities. "After convocation, I again applied there and a board member, the late Ms Modak, seeing my persistence, offered me a three-month job as a social worker had gone on maternity leave," recounts Kalyanvala. Having stayed on ever since, she "picked up Marathi along the way."

Her parents Lt Col Godrej and Zarin Aibara, sister Dilshad Dadachanji, husband Framroze who is a real estate consultant and 17-year-old twin daughters Tanya and Tina are "supportive of my work," notes Roxana declaring, "I am proud to be an Indian and a Parsi."

Over the years the social worker has observed a positive change in the adoption scenario. From previously wanting a fair, male, healthy child, couples now are open to a girl child with even the extended family being supportive of adoption. In the '80s there were children waiting to be adopted; now the families are waiting. At BSSK there is a one-and-a-half-year waiting period. Whilst a few Parsi couples do come forward to adopt children, others come as volunteers or give donations or become sponsors.

It is always a pleasure to renew contacts with adopted children and gratifying to see the kids under the community service doing well for themselves, mentions Kalyanvala pointing out how earlier the kids sponsored under their community program would undertake "courses like plumbing, electrical work, driving. Today they are going for professional courses like teaching, nursing and engineering. This will help the country as a whole."

Those desirous of helping BSSK in any way can contact them at "Bertha Varada," North Main Road, 6<sup>th</sup> Lane, 373, Koregaon Park, Poona 411001; tel: 020 26128002/26055332. ❁



**EXTENTIA**  
Information Technology

Extentia is an international software development and consulting firm catering to global customers.



**Extencore**  
SOLUTIONS

Extencore Solutions is a global engineering services company, providing CAD, CAE, CFD and other allied engineering solutions.

We believe in excellence - in the quality of services we offer, in our production environment,  
and in the people we choose to work with.

Contact us to find out how we can help your business.

www.extentia.com | info@extentia.com | +91-20-26154811

www.extencore.com | info@extencore.com | +91-20-65004640

INDIA | USA | UK | GERMANY